

## **Freeway sees spring launch, Drivers plan for restrictions**

*By Joey Airdo, Independent Newspapers*

North Valley residents will have to tolerate a little extra traffic over the next few years but they will receive an improved freeway system ready for the area's anticipated growth by construction's completion.

The Arizona Department of Transportation Feb. 20 shared an updated Interstate 17 construction timeline with North Valley residents. The department transmitted the information, which included a breakdown of improvement work scheduled for the freeway north of Loop 101, via e-mail.

According to the e-mail, the State Transportation Board approved funding from the Statewide Acceleration Needs Account to advance the start date for a third general purpose lane from Carefree Highway to Anthem Way.

The project was bumped up 14 years to a 2009 start date.

However, construction on I-17 between Loop 101 and Carefree Highway will begin in a few months.

Improvements on the freeway will start with the construction of new interchanges at Jomax Road and Dixileta Drive this spring.

ADOT spokesman Doug Nintzel anticipates the State Transportation Board will make a decision on awarding construction for the project this month.

"Once that happens, the contractor is usually underway within 45 days," Mr. Nintzel said.

Construction of a new Carefree Highway interchange will begin this summer followed by construction of new lanes from Loop 101 to Jomax Road and improvements to the Deer Valley Road interchange this winter.

Before I-17 between Carefree Highway and Anthem Way sees roadwork, ADOT crews must complete construction of new lanes between Jomax Road and Carefree Highway and interchanges at Dove Valley and Lone Mountain roads, which are slated for a spring 2008 start date.

Mr. Nintzel said he would know more about construction once a contractor has been hired but noted drivers should prepare for detours when crews set up work zones.

"We certainly anticipate restrictions when we have major bridge-work to do, including the placement of girders or the pouring of concrete for bridge decks," Mr. Nintzel said.

District 6 Sen. Pamela Gorman discussed I-17 improvement work with North Valley constituents March 2 at Anthem Community Center, 41130 N. Freedom Way. She meets with constituents 9-10 a.m. the first Friday each month.

Ms. Gorman said the new timeline is a drastic improvement. She added North Valley residents are active in expressing their needs for the freeway.

ADOT will leave two lanes open in each direction during construction, according to Ms. Gorman. She said drivers — especially those unfamiliar with I-17 — will likely react to the roadwork by reducing their speed to look at the construction vehicles.

“Unfortunately you are going to get people slowing down,” Ms. Gorman said. “It’s human nature. People want to slow down and look at the forklift.”

However, Mr. Nintzel said ADOT will likely ask drivers to exit I-17 at Carefree Highway and use alternative routes — New River and Cave Creek roads — to travel southbound to Phoenix.

Nonetheless, Ms. Gorman said motorists should remember the construction is a part of progress.

“Plan ahead,” she said. “Leave a little earlier. Anticipate it so you are not frustrated by it.”

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